

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-10 OC-06 CCO-00 SCCT-02

SAB-01 DRC-01 /110 W

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 159

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 00197

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: JEWISH DEMONSTRATION IN DAMASCUS

1. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE REPORTS, ON MARCH 5 APPROXIMATELY 300 TO 400 DAMASCUS JEWS ATTEMPTED TO STAGE A DEMONSTRATION IN THE VICINITY OF THE CENTRAL BANK. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS BROKEN UP BY SYRIAN SECURITY FORCES, APPARENTLY WITH SOME STRONG-ARM MEASURES, BECAUSE THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS THAT A SCORE OR SO OF THE DEMONSTRATORS, INCLUDING WOMEN, HAVE BEEN HOSPITALIZED. ALL JEWISH SHOPS WERE CLOSED YESTERDAY AS A SIGN OF SOLIDARITY.

2. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS REPORTEDLY ORGANIZED FOLLOWING THE FUNERAL OF FOUR JEWISH GIRLS WHOSE CORPSES WERE RELEASED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ON MARCH 4, 1974. THESE GIRLS HAD BEEN MISSING SINCE FEBRUARY 28, 1974, AND IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT THEY HAD PAID EITHER SYRIAN CUSTOMS OFFICIALS OR FEDEYEEN TO SMUGGLE THEM OUT OF THE COUNTRY. THEIR BURNED AND MUTILATED BODIES WERE DISCOVERED IN A CAVE CLOSE TO THE LEBANESE BORDER NEAR THE SYRIAN TOWN OF ZEBADONE. IT IS ALSO BEING BRUITED ABOUT THAT THE GIRLS CARRIED LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY ON THEM.

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3. THE DEMONSTRATORS WERE SAID TO BE SHOUTING DEMANDS TO BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE SYRIA. IN THIS CONNECTION, SYRIAN JEWS REQUIRE SPECIAL PERMITS TO TRAVEL BEYOND THE PERIMETER OF ANY CITY IN WHICH THEY LIVE. BEFORE THE OCTOBER WAR THEY COULD OBTAIN SUCH PERMITS, ALTHOUGH AFTER SOME WAIT, BUT THEY NOW FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO GET ANY.

4. COMMENT: SYRIAN JEWS HAVE BEEN SLIPPING OUT OF SYRIA CLANDESTINELY OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT THAT THE COMMUNITY, WHILE NOT OPENLY HARRASSED, LIVES UNDER APPREHENSION AND THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS IN THE PAST OF SIMILAR DEMONSTRATIONS IN ALEPPO BY JEWS SEEKING TO OBTAIN EXIT VISAS WITH LITTLE SUCCESS. THE DEMONSTRATION THAT HAS NOW OCCURRED COULD PROVE TO BE EMBARRASSING TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AS IT ATTEMPTS TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ISRAELIS. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT "HAARETZ" ON MARCH 3 OR 4 CALLED ON THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO PRESS THE MATTER ON SYRIAN JEWS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SYRIANS (TEL AVIV 1218). FINALLY, WHERE THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT THE DEMONSTRATION YESTERDAY, I CANNOT TELL IF THERE IS ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE ABOVE STORY OF MURDERS AND THE FOLLOWING RUMOR. I AM REPORTING IT, HOWEVER, TO SHOW THAT THE LOCAL SITUATION RE SYRIAN JEWS IS CONFUSED AND MUST BE APPROACHED CAREFULLY. FOR THE LAST FEW DAYS, DAMASCUS HAS ALSO BEEN FILLED WITH STORIES OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF YOUNG GIRLS (NOT JEWISH) BETWEEN THE AGES OF 12 AND 15 AND THE SUBSEQUENT DISCOVERY OF THEIR VIOLATED AND MUTILATED BODIES IN SHALLOW GRAVES. MANY PERSONS HERE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT TO THEM IS A VERY UNUSUAL KIND OF CRIME IN THE ARAB WORLD AND THEY ARE CITING THE CASE SEVERAL MONTHS BACK OF A GANG OF HATCHET KILLERS IN BAGHDAD AS A POSSIBLE ANALOGOUS PHENOMENON.

SCOTES

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